

32. Thomas Howell, *Howell's Devises* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), p. 51.
33. Ibid., p. 53.
34. For a historical approach showing how a poet dependent on patronage can use it in creative, independent ways, see Judith Owens, *Enabling Engagements: Edmund Spenser and the Poetics of Patronage* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002).
35. Booth, *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, pp. 289, 290.
36. Kerrigan, *The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint*, p. 283.
37. Lars Engle, "'I am that I am': Shakespeare's Sonnets and the Economy of Shame", in Schiffer, *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, p. 192.
38. Montaigne, 'Of friendship', p. 139.
39. Michael Neill considers the pervasive influence of a biblical, religious culture upon ideals of service in "'Servile Ministers': *Othello*, *King Lear* and the Sacralization of Service', the 2003 Garnett Sedgwick Memorial Lecture at the University of British Columbia (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2003).

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5 Labours of Love: Women, Marriage, and Service in *Twelfth Night* and *The Complot Servant-Maid*

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When Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* was first performed around 1600, the institution of service in England was in the process of shifting rapidly, if uneasily, from a feudal model based on loyalty and obligation to a wage labour system based on a desire to protect property rights.¹ Service had always been an economic relationship between masters and subordinates, but the nature of this relationship began to change as England developed a proto-capitalist labour system during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Under the feudal ideal of 'universal service', labourers offered their services freely to masters and mistresses in return for protection. These relationships were understood (at least in theory) in terms of loyalty and honour and could often last for many years or even for the entire span of a servant or master's life, as Shakespeare memorably dramatizes in Kent's faithful service to King Lear. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, however, this model of service was gradually giving way to a wage labour system in which servants negotiated yearly contracts with employers and, as a result, depended upon marketable skills in order to obtain new positions or rise in the social hierarchy. No longer a long-term commitment based on loyalty, the institution of service in seventeenth-century England demanded an economically diverse and geographically mobile workforce that could be employed for temporary labour.²

This ideological shift had particular significance for women since service was by far the most common occupation for early modern Englishwomen between the ages of 15 and 24, and women were increasingly replacing men as domestic servants in middling and wealthy households.³ The temporary nature of wage-based service also had different consequences for women than for men: women were expected to work as servants not in order to gain

occupational training per se (as was the case for men) but in order to learn the domestic skills that they would need as wives and to delay their marriages until they were economically and socially prepared for them. Removed from their birth homes and the watchful eyes of parents, female servants occupied ill-defined positions as sexually vulnerable and potentially disorderly singlewomen who were expected to follow an ambiguously defined trajectory that often ended with marriage. However, many female servants experienced a significant gap between the end of their service in their early to mid-twenties and their marriages in their late twenties – a gap often necessitated by poverty – and the lack of sufficient financial resources prevented many female servants from ever marrying.⁴ Women's service thus might have had a presumed trajectory in the period, but it was a trajectory with an uncertain duration and ambiguous ending. By the time of *Twelfth Night*'s first performance, the economic and sexual uncertainties that had come to characterize women's service cried out for solutions, however temporary, provisional or fanciful those solutions might be.

England's difficult and extended transition from a feudal to a wage-based labour system prompted the creation of new literary narratives about female servants, a process that began in the late sixteenth century and continued throughout the seventeenth century. I argue in this essay that texts from the period frequently turn to narratives of marriage – progressive and usually romanticized plot structures in which the telos of female service is marriage – in order to offer a palatable solution and a literary order to a form of women's work that was notoriously indeterminate. As an idealized 'end' of service, marriage provides a tidy conclusion to a messy and unpredictable social situation while also ensuring that the agency and skills women could acquire while in service are safely transferred to their subsequent occupation as wives. In offering these solutions, early modern texts thus simultaneously begin to redefine the scope of female authority by incorporating emerging discourses of skill, marketability and professionalism into their stories about female servants. I look in particular to William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and Hannah Woolley's *The Compleat Servant-Maid* as pivotal texts in the literary history of early modern female servants. I argue that the double-plot structure of Shakespeare's play locates both Viola and Maria within progressive and reassuring narratives of marriage while also calling into being contradictory new subject positions for these female labourers. Attending in particular to the formal mechanisms of *Twelfth Night*, I trace the ideological tensions that shape Shakespeare's bifurcated story of female service. Placing Shakespeare in conversation with the late seventeenth-century writer Hannah Woolley highlights both the resilience of the marriage narrative throughout

the period and its continued social usefulness despite historical changes in women's service work.⁵

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Of all of Shakespeare's comedies, *Twelfth Night* (first performed in 1600 or 1601, first published in the First Folio of 1623) offers the richest possibilities for investigating narratives of female service. Women in service anchor both of the play's two plot strands: the main plot by Viola (Orsino's cross-dressed page) and the Malvolio sub-plot by Maria (Olivia's lady-in-waiting). Though the play ultimately insists upon a romanticized progression from service to marriage, this progression is not identical for both characters. While both Viola's and Maria's paths to marriage via service are strikingly disengaged from economic imperatives, Shakespeare dramatizes their respective relationships and influences at court quite differently. In Maria's story in particular, we begin to see a new form of authority emerging for female servants within the rapidly shifting economic contours of seventeenth-century society.

Viola might at first seem an odd choice to include in a discussion of female service since her role in Orsino's household is performed in the guise of a man; it is Cesario, not Viola per se, who serves as a page in Orsino's court. Indeed, most recent critics of the play read Viola and her servant's disguise in relation to narratives of cross-dressing.⁶ Yet, it is significant that Viola makes the choice to enter service while still a female character; at the level of dramatic narrative, Viola follows the culturally sanctioned progression of an aristocratic female domestic servant: she is separated (albeit unexpectedly) from her family, she enters service at court and she eventually leaves service to get married. Furthermore, the audience is always aware that Viola is a female servant and in possession of, in Jean Howard's phrase, a 'properly "feminine" subjectivity'.⁷ Viola's structural trajectory in the play thus closely resembles other narratives of female service, but Shakespeare's idealization of her route to marriage is noteworthy both for its historical erasures and for its conservative deployment of the formal conventions of romantic comedy.

Viola's foray into domestic service is coded as privileged from the moment that she decides to disguise herself and become a page at Orsino's court. Though the word 'servant' in its modern sense conjures up images of menial labour, it implied a much broader social spectrum in Shakespeare's England. Women from nearly all ranks of early modern society worked as servants in domestic settings; whereas wealthy girls might be employed as ladies-in-waiting at court or as domestic servants in the homes of relatives,

poorer girls might be employed in homes that could afford only one live-in servant.⁸ For most early modern women, in other words, service was a virtually inevitable corollary to youth.

Viola's exact social position is never clearly delineated in the play, but her initial discussion with the sea captain suggests that she is nobly born. Despite narrowly escaping a shipwreck in which the 'ship did split', Viola is still able to reward the captain with gold for his optimistic news about her brother (1.2.9,18).⁹ Furthermore, her decision to enter into service is couched in the rhetoric of choice rather than need. Though the scene seems to imply that Viola chooses her disguise as a practical matter of protection, this motive is not immediately present in Viola's language.¹⁰ Upon hearing the captain speak of Olivia, Viola exclaims:

O that I serv'd that lady,
And might not be deliver'd to the world,
Till I had made mine own occasion mellow,
What my estate is.

(1.2.40–43)

Viola's entrée into service is thus not conditioned by economic need or the hope of social promotion, as was the case for the vast majority of early modern servants, but by a desire for a temporary respite from the world until the appropriate time when her 'estate' may be revealed.¹¹ Nor does the motive for Viola's service change when the captain encourages her to shift her focus from Olivia's household to that of Duke Orsino. Viola rather ambiguously instructs the captain to 'Conceal me what I am, and be my aid / For such disguise as haply shall become / The form of my intent' (1.2.53–5). The fact that Viola's 'intent' cannot be extracted from this scene without a good deal of speculation means that the reader or audience member is left with only a vague rhetoric of choice that is unencumbered by irksome practicalities. The formal elision of need from Viola's narrative – an elision predicated upon her economic wherewithal at the outset – allows her service work to be, from its inception, subordinate to her own desire.

Viola profits from both her class standing and from an exceptionally rosy work environment while in service to Orsino. As a page in Orsino's court, she gains the privilege of access and social connection that accompanies her physical nearness to the Duke, a form of early modern 'networking' that could significantly benefit those women who served at court.¹² Orsino selects Viola/Cesario as his emissary to Olivia precisely because of her intimate knowledge of his affairs. As he tells her: 'I have unclasp'd / To thee the book even of my secret soul' (1.4.13–14). Perhaps even more striking, however, than Viola's intimacy with Orsino is the rapidity of its development. In

Viola's first scene in the Duke's court, Valentine informs her that 'if the Duke continue these favours towards you, Cesario, you are like to be much advanced: he hath known you but three days, and already you are no stranger' (1.4.1–4). Compared to the typical service experiences of young seventeenth-century Englishwomen who spent seven to ten years in service with little hope of social mobility due to the prevalence of yearly contracts, Viola's narrative of service and preferment is ludicrously accelerated.¹³ Indeed, her progress as a servant is romanticized even beyond the scope of the class privilege that attends her nobility; when the Duke tells her to 'Prosper well in this, / And thou shalt live as freely as thy lord, / To call his fortunes thine' (1.4.38–40), he holds out the promise of a status equality that not even the most fortunately positioned royal servant could expect. The excessive idealism of Viola's trajectory as both a comic heroine and a female servant produces a specific fantasy of service characterized by swift advancement and rich rewards that far exceed the typical expectations of servants in wealthy households. The fantastic quality of Viola's story suggests that Shakespeare tells her tale at the expense of other less rosy or promising scenarios.

Though Viola's service does lead to her rapid social advancement, there is no indication in the play that she profits economically from this social promotion. Though the Duke promises Viola a share in his 'fortunes' if she serves him well and though her financial status is undoubtedly bettered by her eventual marriage, her progress to that marriage via her service is conspicuously devoid of financial recompense. At the end of her first visit to Olivia, the countess offers her money, saying 'spend this for me' (1.5.287). But Viola responds by saying, 'I am no fee'd post, lady; keep your purse; / My master, not myself, lacks recompense' (1.5.288–9). Viola shifts the word 'recompense' from an economic to an emotional context, simultaneously insisting that her own labour be located outside of a money economy. Viola's economic dis-interestedness again runs counter to historical narratives of service in which young women worked for many years precisely in order to save up enough money for a dowry.¹⁴ Even well-to-do servants depended upon financial recompense that was often in the form of wages, and saving this money for a dowry was particularly vital to women in the period because they were expected to depend upon husbands rather than on their own occupations for financial maintenance.¹⁵ Seemingly removed from a wage-based labour system, Viola's narrative of service hearkens back nostalgically to a feudal model of duty that was steadily eroding at the time of the play's first production.

This fanciful progression from service to marriage was by no means the only narrative circulating in the period; other texts depict women's service

work in terms of a trajectory that is far more troubled than Viola's and demonstrate that the economic success of service was often quite limited. Isabella Whitney's verse anthology *A Sweet Nosgay* (London, 1573), for example, suggests that service has ends that are potentially less pleasant than marriage. Whitney herself worked as a domestic servant in London, a position that she claims for herself in her anthology. One common thread that runs throughout this disparate collection of texts is Whitney's poverty. In the opening lines of her address to the reader, Whitney indicates that she has recently lost her position as a servant in a London household:

This harvest tyme, I harvestlesse,
and servicelessee also:
And subject unto sicknesse, that
abrode I could not go.
Had leasure good, (though learning lackt)
some study to apply:
To reade such Bookes, wherby I thought
my selfe to edyfy.

(A5v)

Whitney chooses to adopt the persona of a 'harvestlesse' and 'servicelesse' maid who has lost her household position and has fallen into poverty.¹⁶ These expressions of economic loss, repeated throughout the anthology, function to establish her previously held service position as both financially necessary and dangerously subject to the whims of fortune and employers. For Whitney, service does not lead to marriage, but to a 'servicelesse' period filled with sadness and economic hardship, a failed narrative that contrasts sharply with Viola's story of social advancement and romantic fulfilment.¹⁷

Twelfth Night as a whole, however, is not completely oblivious to the financial components of service, even service at court. Feste, Olivia's clown, is absolutely aware of the economics of his position, and he requests and receives money throughout the play.¹⁸ Sir Toby pays Feste to sing in Act 2, as does Orsino, and Sebastian pays him to leave him alone in Act 4. When Orsino comes to Olivia's court in Act 5, Feste manages to get three payments in gold from him by arguing, 'the triplex, sir, is a good tripping measure' (5.1.35–6). Even Viola/Cesario pays Feste his 'expenses' in Act 3 (1.44). The play thus accepts the economic foundations of wage-based service for Feste but not for Viola or, more to the point, not for Viola as a servant who will eventually marry her master. As Cristina Malcolmson has argued, Viola's marriage to Orsino depends upon a model of 'willing service' and a substitution of romantic desire for economic imperatives.¹⁹ In part, *Twelfth Night* marks the shift from feudal to wage-based service through a process of

formal displacement; the play transfers the financial logic of service from Viola to Feste. In Viola's transformation from page to Orsino's 'fancy's queen', the play offers a romanticized narrative of female service and upward mobility that is structurally contingent upon the suppression of other narratives – namely, narratives of limited upward mobility, prolonged service and financial hardship.²⁰

Nevertheless, Viola does emerge in the play as an erotic, desiring subject who acquires a limited agency by virtue of her pleasing speech and rhetorical prowess. In her capacity as Orsino's servant, Viola inadvertently seduces Olivia with her 'poetical' speech and 'comfortable doctrine' (1.5.196, 225). Her monologue at the end of 2.2 enables her to articulate her own erotic attachment to the Duke, as does her veiled discussion with him in 2.4 about her fictional 'sister' who concealed her love. In pleading for her master's love, Viola pleads for her own romantic desires using language borrowed from an older, courtly tradition of romantic service. Neatly collapsing together Viola's story as a servant with her story as a lover and future wife, Shakespeare spins a tale of erotic rather than economic subject-hood. Though Viola's route to marriage is in part structurally conditioned by the 'generic contract' (to borrow Frederic Jameson's phrase) that romantic comedies like *Twelfth Night* share with their audiences, her particular narrative also provides temporary solutions for very real social problems.²¹ By constructing Viola's subjectivity in relation to her erotic desire yet locating that desire within a safe trajectory of marriage, Shakespeare eliminates the threat of the sexually unruly female servant. And, perhaps more significantly, Viola's narrative presents an ideal model of a successful servant by erasing the economic tensions that increasingly characterized the service work of early modern women. Defying the economic logic of both service and marriage, Viola's story in *Twelfth Night* reassures its audience that women in service will secure good ends for themselves in patriarchal marriages seemingly untainted by a proto-capitalist sexual division of labour.²²

Maria, the other half of *Twelfth Night*'s doubled focus on female servants, seems to follow a narrative trajectory that is in many ways similar to Viola's. As Olivia's lady-in-waiting, Maria shares with Viola the privilege of serving in an aristocratic household. She also, like Viola, ends the play with a fortuitous marriage – to Olivia's kinsman, Sir Toby.²³ Furthermore, Maria's route to marriage via service is conspicuously distanced from economic imperatives. The first hints of Maria's marriage prospects come in Act 2 of the play, immediately following the pivotal scene in which Malvolio discovers the love letter, supposedly from Olivia, that Maria has forged. Sir Toby talks with Fabian and Sir Andrew Aguecheek about Maria's clever prank:

Fabian: I will not give my part of this sport for a pension of thousands to be paid from the Sophy.

Sir Toby: I could marry this wench for this device.

Sir And: So could I too.

Sir Toby: And ask no other dowry with her but such another jest.

(2.5.180–85)

In this exchange, Maria's clever manipulation of Malvolio rhetorically acquires economic value; Fabian values it more than 'a pension of thousands', and Sir Toby finds its value equal to that of a marriage portion. Yet, by allowing Maria's 'jest' to substitute for her dowry, the play downplays the importance of the financial components of marriage in the lives of early modern women in service at all social levels. Near the end of the play, Fabian articulates the link between 'jest' and marriage even more explicitly, explaining to Olivia: 'Maria writ / The letter, at Sir Toby's great importance, / In recompense whereof he hath married her' (5.1.361–3). As in the discussion of Maria's dowry in the earlier scene, the citation of the language of economic 'recompense' operates only at the level of metaphor, exposing the fact that this marriage negotiation is only by indirection connected with money matters. Maria's wit is her only dowry. Wit was not, of course, an insignificant attribute; indeed, it was increasingly seen (particularly in the drama) as a valued commodity in seventeenth-century England. However, despite Maria and Sir Toby's comic banter, wit was rarely understood as a sufficient substitute for a dowry. Here we can turn to other forms of literary evidence that articulate the insufficiency of wit as a substitute for a marriage portion. For example, in her autobiographical poem dated 10 November 1632, Martha Moulsworth makes this insufficiency explicit. Describing her upbringing by her father, Moulsworth writes:

Beyond my sex & kind
he did wth learning Lattin decke mind [*sic*]
And whie nott so? the muses ffemalls are
and therfore of Vs ffemales take some care
Two Vniuersities were haue of men
o thatt we had but one of women then

O then thatt would in witt, and tongs surpasses
All art of men thatt is, or euer was
But I of Lattin haue no cause to boast
ffor want of vse, I longe agoe itt lost

[Lattin is not the most
marketable mariadge
mettall

Had I no other portion to my dowre

I might have stood a virgin to this houre

(29–40)²⁴

Moulsworth slyly puns on the word 'Latin' to call attention to the fact that neither Latin (the scholarly language) nor 'latten' (a non-precious metal alloy) nor indeed the 'witt' that women could potentially gain through university education are 'marketable mariadge mettall'; none of these is sufficient for a dowry.²⁵ Wit might enable Moulsworth to write a learned and clever poem, but it is no substitute for money or property in the marriage market. As was true of Viola, Maria's plot progression relies in part on the formal displacement of the economic – in this case through metaphor. Reading Moulsworth's narrative of marriage alongside Shakespeare's highlights the fact that Maria's plot is founded on a particular fantasy of early modern female service in which wit becomes a dubious place holder for economic value.

Though both Maria and Viola progress through service to marriage through similar routes that rely in each case upon a formal suppression of the economic, Maria's service is more complexly realized in the play than is Viola's. To begin with, Maria's entrée into service, unlike Viola's, is absent from the play. Viola's ability to choose her service is, as I have argued, part of the play's romanticization of her labour, but Maria's labour is not subject to this same reading. Because Maria is always already a servant, the play refuses its readers and audience members any sense that her work is either freely chosen or part of some strategic plan. And while Viola dons the guise of service as a respite that is conceived as temporary from its inception, Maria's work is only readable as temporary after her marriage to Sir Toby. Though Viola and Maria ultimately share similar fates, Maria is never given a space in the play from which to reflect upon her service or, indeed, to choose and script her service, as Viola is.

However, given this seeming lack of dramatic agency, Maria nevertheless proves to be the more problematic of *Twelfth Night's* two female servants. Several incidents suggest that Maria's servitude is neither stable nor clearly delineated. Indeed Maria's story in the play – her convoluted progression towards a comic ending – defines her subjectivity not in terms of courtly love rhetoric or erotic desire, as we see with Viola, but in terms of potentially threatening independence and the acquisition of marketable skills. As many critics have pointed out, for example, Maria's proposed plan to gull Malvolio results in Sir Toby's calling her 'Penthesilea', a reference to the Amazon queen with whom Achilles fell in love (2.3.176). Sir Toby's nomenclature implies not only Maria's fierce nature but, as Malcolmson has argued, her potentially threatening 'female independence'.²⁶ Certainly, as a single woman,

Maria poses a greater threat to patriarchal social order than she would as a wife. Indeed the 1563 Statute of Artificers, which stated that local officials could order unmarried women aged 12 to 40 into service, was based on the principle that unmarried and masterless women were inherently disorderly.²⁷ If service was intended to regulate and control the activities of young single women, Sir Toby's reference to the Amazons suggests that service and disorderly independence can coexist for Maria – at least, that is, until her marriage to Sir Toby re-secures her within patriarchal order.

It is Maria's literacy skills, however, that ultimately characterize her as a witty and resourceful servant worthy of reward via marriage. Maria's plan to deliver a forged message of love to Malvolio parodies Viola's own role as Orsino's servant, a role that requires her to serve as Orsino's love emissary. Maria thus manipulates the required functions of service for her own amusement and, indirectly, her own profit; it is, after all, Maria's witty treatment of Malvolio that eventually 'earns' her an upwardly mobile marriage.²⁸ Maria's letter-writing, the essential plot device that leads to Malvolio's gulling, simultaneously advertises Maria's skills as a servant and showcases the status confusion that the acquisition of such skills could provoke. In manipulating the role of servant as love emissary, Maria functions within the bounds of her subordinate position in Olivia's household. However, when Sir Toby asks Maria what she will do to get revenge against the prideful Malvolio, her response suggests that her writing skills may begin to invalidate traditional notions of social subordination:

I will drop in his way some obscure epistles of love, wherein by the colour of his beard, the shape of his leg, the manner of his gait, the expresse of his eye, forehead, and complexion, he shall find himself most feelingly personated. I can write very like my lady your niece; on a forgotten matter we can hardly make distinction of our hands.

(2.3.155–62)

Maria here offers herself as indistinguishable from her mistress; the similarity between Maria and Olivia's handwriting disallows a visual sign of status difference.

An earlier scene in the play foreshadows exactly this type of visual and hierarchical perplexity: the first contact between Viola/Cesario and Maria produces a similar status confusion that temporarily blurs the distinctions between mistress and servant. When Viola first comes to Olivia to plead on behalf of the Duke, Maria is also present. Upon entering, Viola asks, 'The honourable lady of the house, which is she?' (1.5.169). Though Olivia's face is covered by a veil, recognition is not really the issue, since Viola (as she herself admits) has never seen either woman before and, more importantly,

since the two women's relative class status should be apparent from their dress.²⁹ In addition, both women are presumably dressed in mourning garments, which were governed according to very specific and complicated sumptuary regulations during the early modern period.³⁰ As Edith Snook argues, 'because details of mourning dress were regulated by the crown, in keeping with sumptuary laws generally, mourning was an occasion upon which social status was palpable'.³¹ Olivia and Maria's mourning attire, then, should heighten rather than diminish the status distinction between them. Even if we read Viola's misrecognition as a rhetorical game or clever ploy, the theatrical *effect* of this misrecognition remains the same. The question 'which is she?' momentarily collapses the boundary that separates Olivia from her lady-in-waiting – a boundary determined by duty and obedience if not necessarily by wide differentials in social rank. Like Portia's question to the court in *The Merchant of Venice* ('Which is the merchant here? and which the Jew?'),³² Maria's question raises the disturbing possibility that social categories are not immediately readable from visual or sartorial clues. Of course audience members are not in a position to make this same error, since they have been introduced to both characters prior to Viola's entrance. But by staging the spectacle of Viola's misrecognition, even if done to allow the audience the privilege of being in 'the know', Shakespeare begins to suggest the potential threat Maria poses to the social hierarchy of Olivia's court.

In the case of Maria's ability to 'write very like' Olivia, however, status confusion takes an explicitly textual form. Indeed, it is precisely the form and shape of Maria's writing that is at issue, and the intriguing and elusive 'forgotten matter' that provides Maria the basis for her claim suggests that Maria's service has blurred status boundaries in the past, most notably through her ability to write. Maria's writing-literacy, an increasingly valuable skill for servants in affluent early modern households, ironically makes her appear more 'like' her mistress. Being a good servant, in other words, could actually erode the expectation of difference upon which traditional feudal service was based.

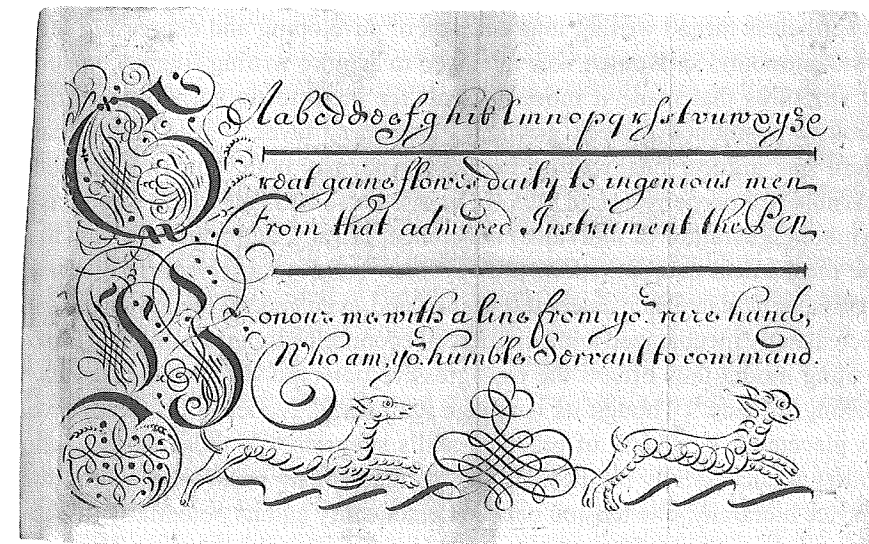
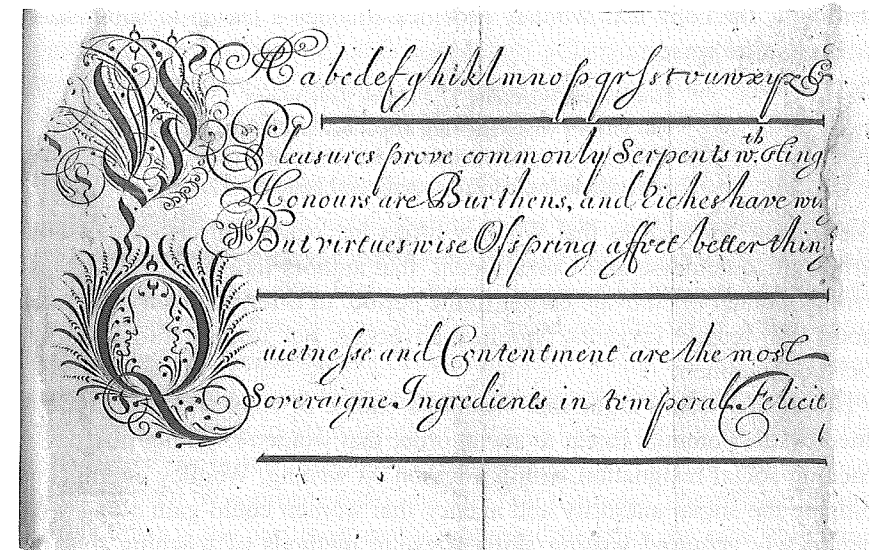
Maria's epistolary skills and her particular ability to 'write very like' Olivia raise problems of status differential that can be detected in early modern practices of teaching writing to girls and, more particularly, to female servants.³³ Women in seventeenth-century England were often taught to write by translating or copying texts; copying was thus an institutionalized component of women's writing-literacy. But copying also had a social function; the texts that women were encouraged to copy were frequently ones that inculcated self-restraint and piety. In his *Instruction of a Christian Woman* (translated into English by Richard Hyrde in 1529 and published in

at least eight subsequent English editions during the sixteenth century) Juan Luis Vives sets very precise standards for the writing models used to educate young women.³⁴ Vives insists that women's models for learning to write should not be 'voyde verses nor wanton or tryflyng songes' but 'some sad sentence prudent and chaste taken out of holy scripture or the sayenges of philosophers' (E2r). Eve Sanders also notes the importance of training women to write through the practice of copying carefully chosen texts. Sanders argues:

though the lines of demarcation were not immovable ... original composition generally was construed as masculine whereas other kinds of writing, chiefly the transcription and translation of devotional texts, could be considered as appropriate feminine tasks given a proper pedagogical justification. ... Women were encouraged to copy texts that would cultivate in them the desired traits of restraint and modesty.³⁵

Thus, copying and following literary models were the socially sanctioned practices by which early modern women learned to write. The lack of distinction between Maria and Olivia's hands can, therefore, be read as the example *par excellence* of Maria's proper inculcation of self-restraint and subservience. By using Olivia as her 'copy text', Maria produces a literary document that mirrors her own secondary position in Olivia's household.

Yet, it is not at all clear that Maria uses her act of copying to develop 'the desired traits of restraint and modesty'. Indeed, her epistolary performance reminds its readers that early modern women's writing was often associated with immodesty and social mobility in addition to self-restraint. We can see these contradictions being teased out in the late seventeenth-century writings of Hannah Woolley. Woolley, who wrote several books on domesticity in the 1660s and 1670s, is a particularly interesting writer to consider in the context of *Twelfth Night* because of the specific, detailed advice that she wrote for female servants.³⁶ Having gleaned 'Thirty years Observations and Experience'³⁷ from working in elite households, Woolley published in 1677 *The Compleat Servant-Maid Or, The Young Maidens Tutor*. In this text, Woolley offers young women a treasure trove of practical advice about how to succeed in almost any service position, including that of waiting woman, chambermaid or scullery maid. One of the practical skills she advocates is writing-literacy, an essential part of the female servant's oeuvre by the late seventeenth century when competition for the best positions had grown increasingly fierce. In a section entitled 'Directions for Writing the most Usual and Legible Hands for Women', Woolley begins by instructing women how to make and hold their pens, but then moves on to specific instruction in writing particular hands. In her instructions for 'Mixt Hand', a composite of secretary and italic, Woolley tells would-be successful servants to 'diligently



5.1 Hannah Woolley, *The Compleat Servant-Maid* (London, 1677), B9r–B10v

mind your Copy, and observe the true proportion and agreement of Letters' (B9v).³⁸ Not only does she advocate copying in the body of her own text, but she also provides a sample for readers to copy on their own (Figure 5.1).

Strikingly, the copy text Woolley provides encodes a lesson in submission within its trite verses:

Honors are Burthens, and riches have wings
But virtues wise Ofspring affect better things
Quiennesse and Contentment are the most
Soveraigne Ingredients in temporal Felicity.

The 'recipe' for success that Woolley offers her readers inscribes the same virtues of 'quiennesse and Contentment' that authors like Vives encouraged writing women to cultivate earlier in the period. In offering this handwriting model for female servants, Woolley advocates not upward mobility, but social contentment.

However, I would argue that Woolley's choice of copy text is also motivated by the potential threat to social order that women's writing posed. By teaching social resignation within a lesson on writing, Woolley attempts to mitigate the social authority and agency that women could gain along with their newly acquired writing skills. Despite methods of teaching that reminded women of their subordinate status, Sanders argues 'some women nevertheless turned writing into a means of developing and expressing their own autonomy. ... Women who managed to acquire writing-literacy, in spite of strictures that made it more difficult for them to do so, were advantageously positioned to seek privileges and curry favor.'³⁹ And, as Michael Neill has argued, handwriting in the period was both 'that which made possible full participation in the new print culture and that which served as a symbolic guarantor of individual difference, privacy, and possession against the mechanical usurpations of print'.⁴⁰ The 'hand' of a woman like Maria, that is, articulated her character, ability and even independence within an increasingly mechanized and commercial economic climate. Woolley's handwriting model thus offsets the transgressive potential of a female servant's writing-literacy.⁴¹ Though its language reminds its reader to be submissive, its placement in a book of practical skills suggests that those women who follow it successfully might become 'advantageously positioned' within the service hierarchy. The tension between practicality and its potentially disruptive ends becomes visible in the formal disjunction that characterizes Woolley's advice.

In this context of women's writing-literacy, Maria's own letter writing in *Twelfth Night* takes on a host of contradictory and potentially subversive meanings. When Malvolio first picks up the forged letter, he exclaims, 'By my life, this is my lady's hand: these be her very C's, her U's, and her T's, and thus makes she her great P's. It is in contempt of question her hand' (2.5.87–90). Maria has learned her writing lesson well; she is able to duplicate

Olivia's handwriting successfully.⁴² This duplication, as I have suggested, signals her subordination, but it also enacts a dangerous replication of the dominant discourse of mastery. Olivia's signature loses its 'quasi-magical authority' and 'individual presence' when Maria is able to reproduce it successfully.⁴³

Malvolio goes on to read the letter: '*To the unknown beloved, this, and my good wishes*. Her very phrases! By your leave, wax. Soft! and the impressure her Lucrece, with which she uses to seal: 'tis my lady!' (2.5.93–6). Ironically, the part of the letter that Malvolio cites as proof of Olivia's identity (her 'very phrases') is its most conventional. Indeed, Woolley later in the century included in *The Gentlewoman's Companion* (1673) sample letters for various occasions, complete with their proper, formulaic opening addresses. Though Malvolio's certainty in identifying the letter as Olivia's is partly a sign of his foolishness (as is his inability to comprehend that Olivia's wax and seal could be used by someone else), the fact that the most 'identifiable' feature of this letter is the part most easily replicated suggests the ease with which roles of mastery can be counterfeited. The play denounces Malvolio for both foolishness and pride; he mistakenly believes the end of the letter, which promises that he will 'alter services' with Olivia, and he behaves haughtily towards his fellow servants. However, Maria's act of letter writing literally allows her to 'alter services' with Olivia and positions her within a similar narrative of social disorder. The formal elements of the letter – the shape of the letters, the formulaic opening, even the wax seal – encode Maria's threatening ability to mimic the discourse of mastery with the skills that she has learned as a servant. It is thus all the more necessary for Olivia to restore proper hierarchy at the end of the play, when she tells Malvolio that 'this is not my writing, / Though I confess much like the character: But out of question, 'tis Maria's hand' (5.1.343–5). Olivia, that is, literally reinscribes the difference between mistress and servant that Maria's writing has temporarily thrown into question.

Twelfth Night thus offers its audience two plots of female service (Viola's and Maria's) that each end in upwardly mobile marriages. Both of these narratives rely on the mystification and formal displacement of the economic components of both service and marriage to secure the play's comic ending. However, while Viola's narrative nostalgically conjures up images of feudal service, courtly love and a safe scenario in which female desire results in patriarchal marriage, Maria's story points to a new type of subjectivity for women in service in early modern England. Though she eventually marries, Maria (unlike Viola) never articulates feelings of love or a desire to wed. Rather, the play grants her agency in conjunction with the specific skill of

writing that she manipulates for her own purposes and pleasure in her letter to Malvolio. What we see in Shakespeare's play is an emerging narrative about the female servant whose subject-hood depends upon her acquisition of marketable skills and proficiencies in a commercial labour economy. However, the practical skills that service mandated always held out the possibility of upward advancement, and the play chooses to resolve this threat to the ideological underpinnings of service by suturing Maria's agency (like Viola's) to a marriage trajectory in which her literacy leads not to her economic independence or occupational promotion, but to her marriage to Sir Toby. In constructing the idealized world of labour relations that is Illyria, Shakespeare performs a logical sleight of hand, suggesting that the authority that servants like Maria and Viola can gain through their labour necessarily leads to its own undoing in the 'solemn combination' of marriage (5.1.382).

* * *

By 1677 when Hannah Woolley published *The Compleat Servant-Maid*, women's service in England was beginning to look quite different than it did nearly a century earlier when *Twelfth Night* was first staged. No longer a transitional form of labour performed almost exclusively by adolescents, household service was rapidly becoming a professional and more permanent activity that demanded specific skills and training.⁴⁴ The social instability that characterized women's service work at the beginning of the seventeenth century gave way to a more rigid class structure, and relationships between masters and servants became 'more obviously exploitative'.⁴⁵ Demographic shifts and the shrinking size of noble houses caused a sharp reduction in employment opportunities coincident with a marked increase in competition for the best positions.

Given these substantial social and economic changes, one would expect Woolley to offer a radically different narrative about young women in service positions than that told by Shakespeare earlier in the century. As a pragmatic text designed for use by women serving in elite households, *The Compleat Servant-Maid* would presumably concentrate on the economic details that Shakespeare's play omits and would propose significant alternatives to the marriage trajectory. However, *The Compleat Servant-Maid* demonstrates quite surprisingly that marriage narratives about female servants continued to be deployed late into the seventeenth century despite significant changes in the service economy. Though the generic form of Woolley's text provides a space from which to offer the types of practical advice that we would not expect to

find in a romantic comedy like *Twelfth Night*, *The Compleat Servant-Maid* nevertheless offers its readers a version of the service-to-marriage trajectory that develops and struggles with the discourse of skill and agency that Shakespeare articulated much earlier in the figure of Maria.

Organized according to the different positions that a female servant could hold and the various tasks that each type of servant would be expected to perform, *The Compleat Servant-Maid* reads like a 'how-to' guide for getting through a day as a servant in an elite household.⁴⁶ Woolley details the vast array of skills and practical knowledge, ranging from basic arithmetic to carving fowl, required of female servants. Woolley is also attentive to the potential economic gains of service, and she repeatedly advocates thrift in her text. She instructs young women to take care to save the money that they earn, telling them to '[I]ay not all your wages upon your back, but lay up something against sickness, and an hundred other casualties' (F8v). *The Compleat Servant-Maid* thus recognizes an economic need and a potential for loss at the core of female service – even elite service – that are in direct contrast to the idealized narrative strands of *Twelfth Night*.

However, the epistle that introduces Woolley's treatise produces a narrative of service that deviates from the practical logic that Woolley depends upon throughout the body of her text. The epistle opens with what seems like an appeal to practicality: 'The great desire I have for your good, advantage and preferment in the world, is such that I respect it equal with my own. I have therefore with great pains and industry composed this little Book, as a Rich Storehouse for you' (A3r–A3v). But even this promise to lead the way to 'advantage and preferment' defers the economic by means of a simile; the advice manual itself, not saved wages, will provide a 'Rich Storehouse' for the young female reader. After listing the (quite practical) set of skills that she will address in her book, Woolley concludes her epistle with the following sales pitch:

So that if you carefully and diligently peruse this Book, and observe the directions therein given, you will soon gain the Title of a Complete Servant-maid, which may be the means of making you a good Mistress: For there is no Sober, Honest, and Discreet man, but will make choice of one, that hath Gained the Reputation of a Good and Complete Servant, for his Wife, rather than one who can do nothing but Trick up her self fine, and like a Bartholomew Baby, is fit for nothing else but to be looked upon.

This Consideration, will I hope, Stir you up to the Attaining of these most Excellent Qualifications, and Accomplishments.

(A5r–A5v)

This passage begins with a clear enough formulation: a young woman can become a 'Complete' servant-maid if she follows the directions Woolley

offers in her treatise. The logic of the rest of the passage, however, is a bit more obtuse; the leap from 'Complete Servant-maid' to 'good Mistress' depends not upon the acquisition of specific skills or upon money, but upon reputation. Practical skills seem to matter because they can demonstrate thrift and productivity to a potential husband, not because they can lead to promotion within the service hierarchy or even because they can lead to higher wages that may, in turn, help a woman save up for a dowry. Just as the handwriting sample within the body of her text offers a practical skill for social advancement but positions that skill within a form that advocates social contentment, Woolley's epistle defines the subjectivity of female servants in terms of the mastery of practical skills but locates those skills within the safe trajectory of marriage – the same trajectory found in *Twelfth Night*. Marriage here serves as an incentive for hard work; it is the ultimate goal that will 'stir up' women to become good servants. Practical skills and female desire are thus channelled into marriage via a route that both relies upon and effaces economic imperatives.

But Woolley's epistle also suggests another narrative in which married life is not simply the goal of female service, but the continuation of it. In arguing that a 'Sober, Honest, and Discreet man' will choose a diligent servant for his wife over a 'Bartholomew Baby', Woolley implies that the skills and diligence of the young servant will become useful when she becomes a wife.⁴⁷ The epistle thus hints at the continuity between the labour of maid-servants and that of wives even as it privileges marriage as the proper 'end' of service: Woolley explicitly calls into question the relationship between marriage and the end of service by producing a narrative that resists closure. Though her choice of genre – the advice book – mandates an attention to practicalities and determines in part the particular narratives of service that she tells, the epistle that frames and advertises a maidservant's responsibilities formally confines those tasks within a structure that advocates a conservative, romantic ideology.

By framing her advice book with this particular epistle, Woolley, like Shakespeare before her, attempts to provide literary order to a form of labour that was changing dramatically in seventeenth-century England. Fictional narratives like *Twelfth Night* and *The Compleat Servant-Maid* increasingly imagined the female servant's subject-hood in terms of her acquisition and mastery of skills and thereby validated a form of female agency that was directly related to her performance as a labourer. However, these and other literary texts throughout the period continued to deploy teleological narratives of marriage that offered fantasies of social order and romantic happiness as reassuring replacements for visions of women's economic independence

or social unrest. By creating narratives of marriage, these texts assure their readers that women's service is predictable and unthreatening, despite all evidence to the contrary, and they insist that the skills women develop while in service will be put to good use within the patriarchal home when these same women become immensely savvy and practical wives. In other words, when a young woman reads in Woolley's book how to dismember a hen or how to wash coloured silk, she knows that these are practical skills worth cultivating if she wishes to become a 'complete' servant. But she also knows (if she has read carefully) that if she performs these tasks diligently and if a 'Sober, Honest, and Discreet man' happens to be watching, she might get the chance to perform them all over again – as a wife.

NOTES

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1. For the gradual replacement of the feudal ideology of service with a wage labour system in the period, see Michael Neill, *Putting History to the Question: Power, Politics, and Society in English Renaissance Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 28–39; Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 201–3; Mark Thornton Burnett, *Masters and Servants in English Renaissance Drama and Cultural: Authority and Obedience* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), pp. 4–5, 8–9; Mary Ellen Lamb, 'Tracing a Heterosexual Erotics of Service in *Twelfth Night* and the Autobiographical Writings of Thomas Whythorne and Anne Clifford', *Criticism* 40(1) (1998), pp. 1–25, esp. pp. 1–7.
2. See Ann Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 8–10; Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580–1680* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1982), pp. 42, 74; Fran Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England 1550–1700* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 65–7; Mario DiGangi, *The Homeroitics of Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 75; and A.L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560–1640* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 22–5.
3. See Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 92–4. For medieval England, see Maryanne Kowaleski, 'Women's Work in a Market Town: Exeter in the Late Fourteenth Century', in Barbara A. Hanawalt, ed., *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 145–64, esp. p. 153. For the increase in female household servants during the early modern period, see

- Anne Laurence, *Women in England 1500–1760: A Social History* (London: Phoenix Giant, 1994), pp. 134–5 and Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 151. For both men and women in the period, youth was virtually synonymous with service; about 60 per cent of those aged 15 to 24 were servants living in the households of families other than their birth families. See Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry*, p. 3 and Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 32–3.
4. For service as a transitional position, see Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry*, p. 4; Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, p. 32; and Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, pp. 92–6. For the gender distinctions that characterized this transition, see Paul Griffiths, *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England 1560–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 28–9 and Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth*, p. 133. On service as preparation for marriage, see Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide, 'A Singular Past', in Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide, eds, *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250–1800* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 9–10; Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, p. 96; and Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth*, pp. 227–32.
 5. In this essay, I am interested in the category of the domestic servant, the most common form of female service in the period, particularly in urban settings (Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, p. 32; Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, pp. 99–100; Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth*, pp. 150–51). These women were expected to perform a wide range of household tasks that varied depending on the economic status of the household and the hierarchical status of an individual servant within that household. For servants in husbandry, see Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, pp. 99–101 and Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry*, pp. 4–5.
 6. The body of literature on the subject of cross-dressing is extremely large. Particularly noteworthy examples that discuss *Twelfth Night* include Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 66–93; Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 9–36; Jean E. Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 93–128; Stephen Orgel, 'Nobody's Perfect: Or Why did the English Stage take Boys for Women?', *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 88 (1989), pp. 7–29; Katherine McLuskie, 'The Act, the Role and the Actor: Boy Actresses on the Elizabethan Stage', *New Theatre Quarterly* 3 (1987), pp. 120–30; Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 117–44; and Dymnna Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 26–48.
 7. Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle*, p. 113.
 8. See Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, p. 94; Sue Wright, '"Churmaids, Huswyfes, and Hucksters": The Employment of Women in Tudor and Stuart Salisbury', *Women and Work in Pre-Industrial England* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), pp. 100–21, esp. pp. 102–3; Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry*, p. 9; and Lu Emily Pearson, *Elizabethans at Home* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), p. 442.

9. William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, ed. J.M. Lothian and T.W. Craik (London: Methuen, 1975). All citations will be taken from this edition of the play. For Viola's ambiguous class status, see Cristina Malcolmson, '"What You Will": Social Mobility and Gender in *Twelfth Night*', in Valerie Wayne, ed., *The Matter of Difference: Materialist Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 29–57, esp. p. 34.
10. Compare Viola's decision, for example, to that of Rosalind in *As You Like It*, who explicitly dons male attire because of the physical danger that attends her and Celia's travel to Arden (1.3.106–22). *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).
11. On the economic function of women's service, see Bennett and Froide, 'A Singular Past', pp. 1–37, esp. pp. 9–10 and Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, p. 96. On *Twelfth Night* see Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle*, p. 113 where she describes Viola's cross-dressing as a 'holding place' rather than an intentionally transgressive act. See also Leah S. Marcus, 'Shakespeare's Comic Heroines, Elizabeth I, and the Political Uses of Androgyny', in Mary Beth Rose, ed., *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Literary and Historical Perspectives* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), pp. 135–53, esp. p. 147 where she argues that Viola's male disguise is linked 'inextricably with the search and testing of an appropriate partner', rendering it less threatening to patriarchal norms. On Viola's desire, see Malcolmson, '"What You Will"', p. 32.
12. For a discussion of royal service and its particular rewards in the context of Queen Elizabeth and her waiting women, see Elizabeth A. Brown, '"Companion Me With My Mistress": Cleopatra, Elizabeth I, and Their Waiting Women', in Susan Frye and Karen Robertson, eds, *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women's Alliances in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 131–45. For Queen Anne's court, see Leeds Barroll, 'The Court of the First Stuart Queen', in Linda Levy Peck, ed., *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 191–208, esp. pp. 203–5. On pages, see Linda Anderson, 'Shakespeare's Servants', *Shakespeare Yearbook* 2 (1991), pp. 149–61, esp. pp. 152–3.
13. See Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, pp. 102–6; Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth*, pp. 152–3; Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry*, p. 4; Wrightson, *English Society*, p. 42; Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, p. 32; Beier, *Masterless Men*, pp. 24–5; Marjorie McIntosh, 'Servants and the Household Unit in an Elizabethan English Community', *Journal of Family History* 9(1) (1984), pp. 3–23, esp. pp. 15–16 and 18–19; Lori Humphrey Newcomb, 'The Romance of Service: The Simple History of *Pandosto's* Servant Readers', in Constance C. Relihan, ed., *Framing Elizabethan Fictions: Contemporary Approaches to Early Modern Narrative Prose* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1996), pp. 117–39, esp. pp. 119–21; and Vivian Brodsky, 'Single Women in the London Marriage Market: Age, Status and Mobility, 1598–1619', *The Newberry Papers in Family and Community History* 80(2) (1980), pp. 1–29, esp. p. 4.
14. Demographic evidence about women's age at first marriage reflects this economic necessity. As Mendelson and Crawford write, '[t]he custom of late marriage was closely linked to the prevailing low rates of wages for maidservants. Women were expected to save out of their earnings for a dowry, but with maidservants' salaries

- at rock-bottom, they found it difficult to save anything at all' (*Women in Early Modern England*, p. 108). For a detailed demographic study, see Brodsky, 'Single Women'. For the importance for female servants of saving up wages to amass a marriage portion, see Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth*, p. 154; Burnett, *Masters and Servants*, pp. 118–19; McIntosh, 'Servants and the Household Unit', pp. 4, 18; and Ilona Bell, 'In Defense of Their Lawful Liberty: A Letter sent by the Maydens of London, Women', in Mary E. Burke, Jane Donawerth, Linda L. Dove and Karen Nelson, eds, *Writing, and the Reproduction of Culture in Tudor and Stuart Britain* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), pp. 177–92, esp. p. 186. For the low wages of female servants, see Maryanne Kowaleski, 'Singlewomen in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: The Demographic Perspective', in Bennett and Froide, *Singlewomen in the European Past*, pp. 38–82, esp. p. 57 and Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 85.
15. Indeed, the presumed dependence of women upon men served as the rationale for the lower wages of maidservants, and of female workers more generally. See Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, p. 103. For royal servants, see Brown, "Companion Me with My Mistress", p. 132. Malcolmson also reads the play in terms of the erosion of the 'feudal foundations' of service ("What You Will", p. 51).
 16. Ann Rosalind Jones makes similar claims about this passage in 'Maidservants of London: Sisterhoods of Kinship and Labor', in Susan Frye and Karen Robertson, eds, *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women's Alliances in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 21–32, esp. p. 24.
 17. Ben-Amos notes that 'if most people in early modern English society married only when they reached their late twenties, and if many left service in their early and mid-twenties, there is bound to have been, for many people, a gap between the two events' (*Adolescence and Youth*, p. 227). She discusses many possible explanations for this gap, including poverty and 'apprehension about married life and its demands' (p. 230). Certainly Whitney, according to the persona that she presents in the *Nosgay*, fits into this gap and, therefore, provides an important exception to the 'norm' of female service – both in historical and literary representations.
 18. For Feste as an example of a servant whose poverty demands that he increase his wages via tips, see Lamb, 'Tracing a Heterosexual Erotics', pp. 6, 21.
 19. Malcolmson, "What You Will", p. 51.
 20. The play also substitutes Viola's marriage to Orsino for a more common early modern scenario in which masters sexually abused their female servants. See note 14 above. For instances when female servants *did* marry their masters, see Brodsky, 'Single Women', p. 11. In a longer version of this essay, I look at literary narratives that represent the sexual vulnerability of female servants and that rewrite the marriage trajectory in terms of predatory masters and illicit desire.
 21. Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 106. For a reading of comedy as a genre that 'reveals the approved social trajectory of young women from dutiful virgins to wives', see Theodora A. Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), p. 123. See also Mihoko Suzuki, 'Gender, Class, and the Ideology of Comic Form: *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Twelfth Night*', in Dymrna Callaghan, ed., *A*

- Feminist Companion to Shakespeare* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 121–43.
22. See Burnett's argument that female servants were viewed in early modern drama as 'anomalous subjects needing to be placed' and were, in turn, 'imagined in relation to mechanisms that subordinated them to the authority of central social institutions' (*Masters and Servants*, p. 132).
 23. Though there is no direct evidence from the play that conclusively establishes the precise relationship between Sir Toby's social rank and Maria's, Malcolmson argues convincingly that both Viola's and Maria's marriages are upwardly mobile ("What You Will", p. 34).
 24. 'The Memorandum of Martha Moulsworth Widdowe', 'My Name Was Martha': *A Renaissance Woman's Autobiographical Poem*, ed. Robert C. Evans and Barbara Wiedemann (West Cornwall, Conn.: Locust Hill Press, 1993), pp. 4–8.
 25. For an excellent discussion of Moulsworth's puns, see Anne Lake Prescott, 'Marginally Funny: Martha Moulsworth's Puns', in Robert C. Evans and Anne C. Little, eds, *The Muses Females Are: Martha Moulsworth and Other Woman Writers of the English Renaissance* (West Cornwall, Conn.: Locust Hill Press, 1995), pp. 85–90.
 26. Malcolmson, "What You Will", p. 41. Burnett cites the Penthesilea reference as evidence that Maria turns gender boundaries 'upside-down' (*Masters and Servants*, p. 142).
 27. Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, p. 96. They go on to note that 'While in theory men too could be ordered into harvest work, we have found no instances of the Act being applied to adult men in the same way as to women' (p. 101n). For the threat of the singlewoman, see also Griffiths, *Youth and Authority*, pp. 358–9.
 28. And yet, if Maria tinkers with her role as servant to suit her own purposes, that tinkering is never unambiguously validated by the play, as the critical debate over how to 'read' Malvolio's mistreatment and final call for revenge makes clear. If, as Olivia claims, Malvolio has been 'notoriously abused', that abuse stems directly from Maria's forged letter. On this debate, see Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women*, p. 34 and Lothian and Craik, *Twelfth Night*, Introduction, 1–1xi.
 29. On clothing as a marker of social status, see Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women*, pp. 32–3 and Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 17–21.
 30. See Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family in England 1480–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 248–54 and Lou Taylor, *Mourning Dress: A Costume and Social History* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), p. 66.
 31. Edith Snook, "Fellowship in their apparel, [...] obedience in their fashions": Clothing the Subject in Lady Mary Wroth's *countess of Montgomery's Urania*, unpublished essay, 2004.
 32. William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 4.1.174, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, 2nd edn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).
 33. For Maria's letter writing in the context of autobiographical writings, see Lamb, 'Tracing a Heterosexual Erotics', pp. 10–17.

34. For the publication history of *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, see the introduction to the edition prepared by Virginia Walcott Beauchamp et al. (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 2002), esp. pp. lxxvii–xciii.
35. Eve Sanders, *Gender and Literacy on Stage in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 172.
36. For a good discussion of Woolley as a writer of domestic household guides, see Wall, *Staging Domesticity*, pp. 54–8. See also Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing 1649–88* (London: Virago Press, 1988), pp. 166–75.
37. Woolley, *The Gentlewoman's Companion or a Guide to the Female Sex* (London, 1673), A4r.
38. For mixed hand and its relationship to gender, see Sanders, *Gender and Literacy*, pp. 173–4. See also Erickson, *Woman and Property*, p. 56 for Woolley as a writing instructor.
39. Sanders, *Gender and Literacy*, p. 181.
40. Neill, *Putting History to the Question*, p. 173.
41. For servants' literacy as a route to 'social advancement', see Newcomb, 'The Romance of Service', pp. 125–7.
42. Of course, the particular letters that Maria has copied effect a sexual pun that Callaghan discusses nicely and at length (*Shakespeare Without Women*, pp. 36–47). One could also argue, therefore, that Maria's letter-writing threatens not only social place, but also sexual decorum and gender roles.
43. See Neill, *Putting History to the Question*, p. 173.
44. See especially Wall, *Staging Domesticity*, pp. 54–7; Newcomb, 'The Romance of Service', pp. 121–2; and Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry*, p. 83.
45. Lori Humphrey Newcomb, *Reading Popular Romance in Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 219.
46. Woolley's body of work is consistently interested in upper-class domesticity and, therefore, her representation of female service work attends only to this privileged group of servants. See Erickson, *Women and Property*, p. 56. Wall makes the important point that Woolley does not write 'from an elite position' herself (*Staging Domesticity*, p. 54), though the households she describes are certainly aristocratic ones.
47. Indeed, when we compare the tasks described in *The Compleat Servant-Maid* to the tasks described in Woolley's other books, such as *The Gentlewoman's Companion*, that are addressed to wives, we see that the skill sets are almost identical for both groups of women. Historians have likewise argued that 'married women's work routine was very similar to that of maidservants in its motley character' (Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, p. 108). Even if a woman's occupational identity might change at her marriage (something that was not generally true of men in the period), her daily labour might not look much different than it did prior to marriage. See Burnett, *Masters and Servants*, p. 119 and Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, pp. 309–10 (though Wrightson does not clearly distinguish between occupational identity and actual skill sets or tasks).

6 'A woman's service': Gender, Subordination, and the Erotics of Rank in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries

Michael Neill

When Thomas Middleton and William Rowley set about adapting a story from John Reynolds's recently published *Triumphs of Gods Revenge Against ... Murther*¹ for the main plot of *The Changeling* (1622), they made a number of significant changes to the original: most of these were evidently prompted either by considerations of dramatic economy or by a wish to sharpen and clarify the moral patterns of the narrative. Thus, for example, where in Reynolds's 'Alsemero and Beatrice-Ioana' the action moves between Valencia, Briamata and various locations in Alicant, its equivalent in *The Changeling* is confined to Vermandero's castle and the church beside its walls; and, where Reynolds's indictment of the adulterous Beatrice-Ioana is complicated by her jealous husband's complicity in the killing of one Piracquo brother and his cowardly murder of the other, Middleton and Rowley make Alsemero the blameless victim of his wife's treachery. The dramatists did, however, introduce one crucial alteration for which it is difficult to account in such straightforwardly technical ways. This involves their treatment of Beatrice-Ioana's adulterous accomplice, De Flores, who, even as he is promoted from his relatively insignificant role in the original narrative to become the co-protagonist of the tragedy, is simultaneously degraded to a distinctly inferior position in the play's social hierarchy. In *The Triumphs* he is 'Seigneur Antonio de Flores', described as 'a Gallant young Gentleman, of the Garrison of the Castle', a youth of some status, whom Beatrice-Ioana chooses as her accessory, and ultimately as her lover, because she knows that he 'doth deeply honour, and dearely affect her';² by contrast Middleton and Rowley's De Flores is a mere household servant – a gentleman by birth, it is true, but